

Corticosteroids

Corticosteroids are very powerful drugs that reduce inflammation in various tissues of the body. These drugs are used to treat many of the symptoms of lupus that result from inflammation. You can take this medication as pills or by injection. Corticosteroid creams or ointments are also available to treat skin rashes caused by lupus. Most lupus symptoms respond quickly to corticosteroids. Prednisone is a corticosteroid that is often used to treat lupus.

The decision to begin corticosteroids is a big one and depends on your needs. Some patients may need to take the drug for a short time only, until disease symptoms get better or go away. Others with more serious or life-threatening problems may require higher doses of the drug for longer periods of time. In general, once your lupus symptoms have responded to treatment, you will gradually take less and less of the drug until you can stop completely. If it is not possible for you to stop the drug completely, your doctor will give you the smallest amount possible to keep symptoms under control.

Doctors are careful about prescribing corticosteroids because many complications are associated with taking this drug. As a result, it is important to take the drug exactly as prescribed. People who have been taking corticosteroids for a long time may need higher doses of the drug before, during, or after a physically stressful event, such as surgery.

INSTRUCTIONS

The brand name of your corticosteroid is: _____

The dose of the corticosteroid that is ordered for you is: _____

Take the corticosteroid _____ time(s) a day.

The best time(s) to take your corticosteroid: _____

You may take your corticosteroid with food or after meals if stomach upset occurs.

POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS

These include changes in appearance (such as acne or increased facial hair); development of a round or moon-shaped face; thin, fragile skin that bruises easily; or movement of body fat to the trunk. You might also experience mood changes, personality changes, irritability, agitation, or depression.

Other possible side effects include increased appetite and weight gain, poor wound healing, headache, glaucoma, irregular menstrual periods, peptic ulcer, muscle weakness, osteoporosis, steroid-induced diabetes, and osteonecrosis (damage to the hip joint that leads to severe arthritis).

PRECAUTIONS

Because corticosteroids cross the placenta, they are used cautiously during pregnancy. The drugs appear in breast milk, so if you are taking large doses, you should not breastfeed.

Avoid exposure to infections. Stay away from crowds and people known to have colds, the flu, or other infections.

Schedule regular vision checkups and report any problems with your vision to your doctor or nurse.

Talk with a registered dietitian to find out how to prevent excess weight gain and minimize certain drug effects on the body.

Do not take this drug with other drugs, including over-the-counter medications, without first checking with your nurse or doctor. Over-the-counter

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Additional instructions: _____

that you can get without a doctor's prescription.

Tell any nurse, doctor, or dentist who is taking care of you that you are taking corticosteroids for your lupus.

WARNINGS!

Do not take this drug if you have ever had an allergic reaction to it.

Carry medical identification and wear a bracelet to alert medical personnel that you take a corticosteroid.

NEVER MISS A DOSE. Take this drug exactly as ordered.

IF YOU DO MISS A DOSE, call your nurse or doctor immediately to find out when you should take the missed dose.

NEVER STOP THE MEDICATION SUDDENLY. Your adrenal glands, which are located just above your kidneys, normally make corticosteroids in small amounts. These corticosteroids are important for many body functions. When you take corticosteroid medication, your body begins to make much less than usual, or even stops completely. If you suddenly stop taking your medication, you may have a problem because your adrenal glands won't have had time to make the corticosteroids you need. This problem is called "adrenal insufficiency."

Signs of adrenal insufficiency include weakness, fatigue, fever, weight loss, vomiting, diarrhea, and abdominal pain. If you experience any of these problems, call your nurse or doctor immediately.